

# The Equipment Might Be Different, But The Challenge Is Greater Than Ever

U. S. woman sit-skier caught the competitive bug in a non-traditional way

Jean Croasmun, *Courier Staff*

Not many world-class cross-country competitors can say they weren't very athletic well into their twenties. And not many 45-year-old women continue to compete. But Candace Cable is different.

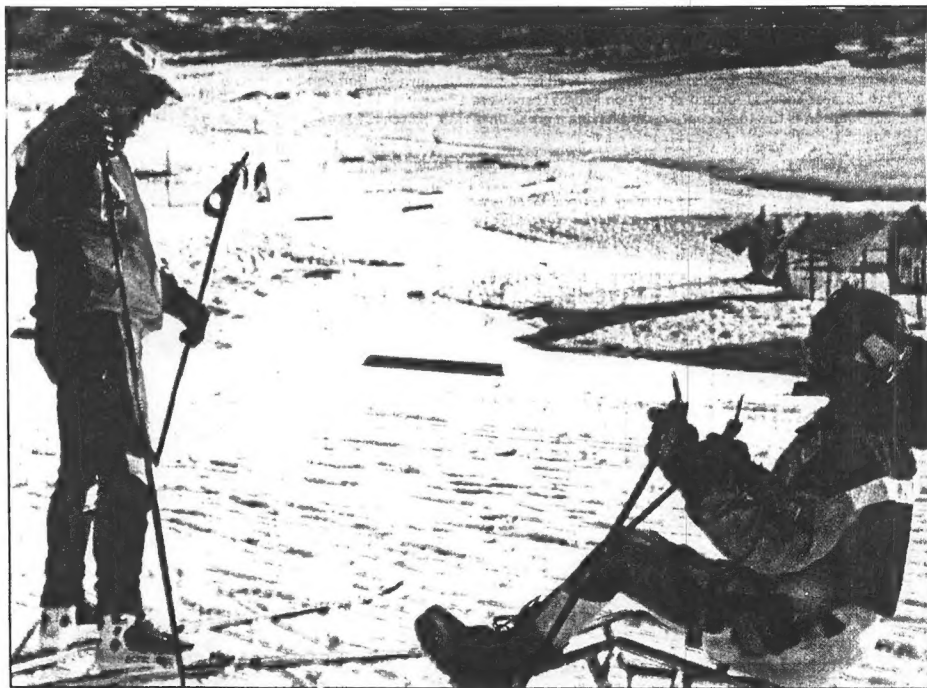
Even at the age of 21, while Cable was living in the winter wonderland of Tahoe, Cable regularly chose dancing and socializing over shredding a mountain. In fact, she herself, was barely off the bunny slopes at that age. Athletically, Cable was a late bloomer.

Not any more.

Last week, Cable took first in every one of the women's sit-ski competition at Soldier Hollow. Not an easy feat, even though Cable was the only one competing in those races.

That's because in a sit-ski cross-country competition, there's more to worry about than just what the person in the next lane is doing—there's the worry about when the event, if the event, is ever going to end.

"Double pole," says Cable. That's what she does, as do all of the other competitors, in sit-ski races. They double pole, dragging themselves up, sheerly by the strength of their arms, through 5km and 10 km of oftentimes unforgiving cross country uphill and break with their poles on tenuous downhill.



Sit-skier Candace Cable, in town for last week's cross-country nationals, talks to one of her coaches.

They rely on their arms for the strength

California, where she had gone after



Candace Cable poles herself through a 5km race at Soldier Hollow.

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Cable went to college; "The state was paying for it," she says. At first she thought she might pursue a law degree, but the more time she spent on campus, the more she got to know other people, like her, in wheelchairs. And that's when Cable started becoming more physically active.

"I met other people in wheelchairs," says Cable. And just like her former interest in sports—as an opportunity to socialize and meet men, Cable used her connection with other wheelchair-bound students as a chance to meet more people.

"At first, it was a social thing. I wanted to know how they dealt with things," says Cable. She was interested in how others handled the odd looks able-bodied people gave her as she wheeled by. She was interested in knowing how they maneuvered certain tasks. She was interested in how they accepted their fate. And through all of her inquisitiveness, Cable found herself starting to become active.

"I started swimming. I thought no one would really know I was in a wheelchair when I was under water," says Cable. Cable began swimming regularly, building upper body strength, and soon started competing.

"My first competition. . . I almost drowned. The water was so cold, it was the most pathetic thing," says Cable. She got more serious, joined the schools swim team, and qualified for the nationals in 1980.

It was at the National Wheelchair Games in New York that Cable met someone who would get her one step closer to the competitions she thrives in today. "In 1980, I met a woman who saw me swimming. She suggested racing wheelchairs." Cable, realizing that there was some cash to be made in wheelchair racing, took the advice to heart.

"I had pin arms," laughs Cable, thinking of her younger days. Now her arms do almost everything physical for her.

"They're very helpful here, asking what they can do, any changes we can come up with," says Bixby. Sit-ski cross country is still a growing sport, one that hasn't taken off rapidly in the United States, and one that is being embraced

by U. S. audiences more slowly than other disabled winter sports.

Bixby works with Cable's equipment, always looking for a way to improve her sit-ski for speed and accuracy. Technically, the sit-skis don't look like much, a chair supported by an aluminum frame, snapped onto a couple of regular cross-country skis. But getting the right materials, the proper weight distribution, and the lightest possible parts, while still allowing the skier to maintain control and remain competitive with the other skiers are issues Bixby faces daily.

"We change about every year," says Bixby, indicating that technology or materials available make a new sled a necessity to remain competitive. Coaches, racers, and equipment gurus like Bixby spend a lot of time at competitions looking at other competitors sleds, their bindings, the materials involved in the creation of a fast moving vehicle. Bixby takes pictures to copy the ideas back home, then looks for welders who can help him with the arduous, tedious and sometimes unforgiving task of manufacturing the sled.

"There's only one company that commercially makes sit-skis. It's hard to get a generic frame that works for everyone," says Bixby. In the past, Bixby has worked with modified bi-skis and adaptive skis that moved with Cable. Now Bixby works with regular cross-country skis.

Both Bixby and Cable admit that the Europeans are far advanced over the Americans in terms of equipment. "We went to Lillehammer," says Bixby, "and [Americans] were the only people still welding and bolting. Everyone else was using bindings." Bixby went home and made the same type of sled for Cable, using regular cross-country skis and traditional bindings.

Now manufacturers that wouldn't touch Cable's special equipment are amazed at how simplistic the design is. More people are showing interest.

But disabled skiing still has a long way to go. Cable didn't get involved in sit-ski cross country competitions until after she had won six Boston Marathons and competed, successfully, in disabled downhill skiing.

"Cross-country's not that popular," says

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# Open Letter To The Citizens Of Wasatch County

Dear Citizen,

On January 24 at 2:00 pm, the three Wasatch County Commissioners will vote on proposed ordinance 16.04.020 "Clustered Developments".

This ordinance would reduce lot size and could substantially increase housing density in Wasatch County.

Is massive housing density driven by developers that would eliminate rural surroundings a concern to you?

Contact your commissioners to express your views and your vision of the type of future growth you would like pursued.

Commissioner Ralph Duke  
654-2720, cell 671-1791  
rduke@co.wasatch.ut.us

Commissioner LeRen Provost  
654-0220

lprovost@co.wasatch.ut.us

Commissioner Mike Kohler  
654-3728, cell 671-0842  
mkohler@co.wasatch.ut.us

Secretary  
msabey@co.wasatch.ut.us

County Commission Office  
25 North Main Street  
Heber City, UT 84032

Sincerely,

*Jerry Strand*  
Jerry Strand

Member,  
Citizens Committee for Lake  
and Center Creek

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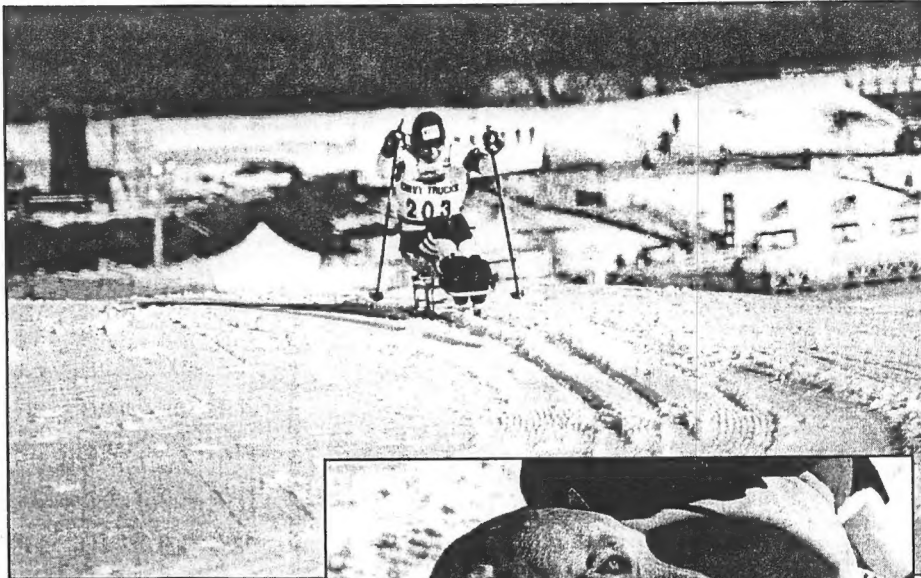
Cable, blaming only a small part on America's lack of interest in sit-skiing on the country's lack of interest cross-country skiing. "A lot of cross country areas don't have equipment [sit-skis] for people to try out. It's a total friction sport and that stops most people from wanting to try. It's the hardest thing I've ever done," says Cable.

Cross-country audiences in the U. S. are slowly building; however disabled sports have a long way to go to catch up to the audiences abroad. Unfortunately this lack of audience has other repercussions on competitors like Cable their inability to find sponsorship.

Cable still competes in road races during the summers for the prize money and the workout. During her cross-country season, though, Cable relies on sponsorship cash dollars and equipment donations from corporations in return for Cable's endorsement. Visa is one of her sponsors, Scott is another. And while the corporations can capitalize on the athletes' endorsements, the media is still sometimes a little too cautious of the incorrectly stereotyped images "helplessness," "different," and "ill" that disabled athletes, no matter how fit, can conjure up in the minds of consumers. "The question becomes do we want to put it out there?" asks Cable.

"We'll probably all be in wheelchairs," says Bixby.

"It's hard to get the media to come to [disabled competitions and events]," says Cable. "It's tough to get them to take pictures and put it on television. There's a guilt in saying, I'm glad that's not me."



**Above—Candace Cable cruises through the finish line at Soldier Hollow.**

**Right—Homey, Candace Cable's K-9 companion, can do everything from picking up a dropped pen to retrieving a run-away wheelchair.**

Cable hopes to be in town again in 2002 to compete in the Paralympics at Soldier Hollow. She competed at the last two Paralympic games in cross-country competitions, and medaled in 1992's alpine competitions in Albertville. But competing in an international cross-country competition in front of a home audience would be a treat, and a dream. **W**

